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CHARLES WILLSON PEALE'S

ALLEGORY OF

WILLIAM PITT, EARL OF CHATHAM

AND THE PITT STATUES IN CORK, IRELAND, AND
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

BY

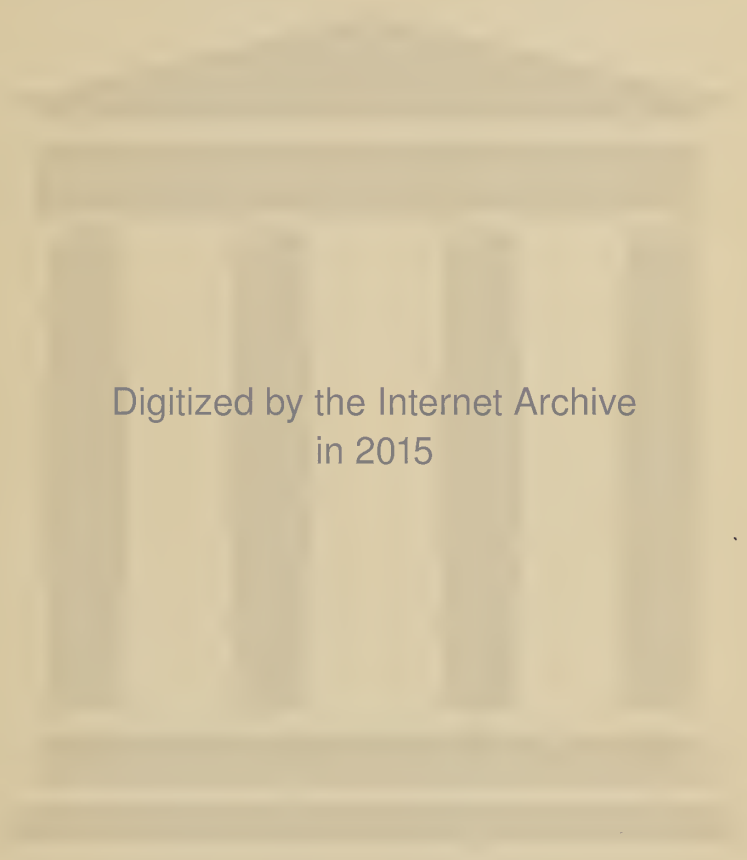
CHARLES HENRY HART

Presented to the Massachusetts Historical Society
February 11, 1915

BOSTON
1915







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Worthy of Liberty. Mr Pitt seems to invade the Liberties of other Peoples

The British Park, June 1791

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ALLEGORY OF WILLIAM PITT

In the very important "Volume LXXI" of *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, recently issued, containing the *Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham*, will be found, on pages 100 to 104, three documents of peculiar interest. One of them is the draft of a letter from John Singleton Copley to Charles Willson Peale, acknowledging from Peale an impression of his mezzotint allegory of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, and the other two are broadsides issued by Peale, advertising the allegory. The original letter that passed from Copley to Peale varies in so many particulars from the original draft, as is often the way in such cases, that I have transcribed it, by permission, from the original in the Brook Club, New York, where it hangs pendant to Copley's portrait of Governor George Scott of Dominica.

BOSTON, Decr. 17, 1770.

DEAR SIR, — I received your favour of the 24. of Novr: with your kind present which came to hand in good order; it gave me a tooftold pleasure; first because it is the portrait of that great Man, in the most exalted carractor human can be dignified with, that of a true Patriot vindicateing the rights of Mankind; and secondly for the merit of the work itself, and the fair prospect it affords of Americas rivaling the Continant of Europe in those refined Arts that have been justly esteemed the Greatest glory of ancient Greece and Rome; go on Sir to hasten forward that happy Era.

How little my natural abillitys or oppertunitys of improvements may be adiquate to the promoteing so great a work, yet I should sincerely participate with those great Souls who are happily possessd of boath in a soverain degree.

The Aligory strikes me as unexceptionably in every part and strongly expressive of the Ideas it is design'd to convey. the Attitude which is simple is possessed of great dignity with a becoming energy; from what the print expresses I am induced to wish to see ye paint-

ing ye force of Colouring gives strength and perfection to the Clear obscure.

Permit me to conclude with my sincere thanks for the kind notice you have taken of me as well in the expressions accompanying the print as in the print itself. for the first if not for boath, I cannot expect to be out of your Debt. I am Dear Sir Your sincere friend & Humble; Sert.

JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY

[Superscription]

For/Mr Chs. Willson Peale/
 portrait Painter in "Annapolis"/¹
 pr favour Meriland

The prospectus or advertisement proper, entitled "A/Description/of the/Picture and Mezzotinto/of/Mr. Pitt,/Done by/Charles Willson Peale,/of Maryland./" is reproduced in facsimile, in the volume, from an original in the Manuscript Department of the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., where it was unearthed, some time ago, by the industry of Mr. Worthington C. Ford; but the supplementary broadside, entitled "Extract of a Letter," is taken from one in the Public Record Office, London, where are the other papers printed. To collectors of Americana this print is a *rara avis*, much desired but seldom found, as there are but eight impressions known to be in existence.² It is a folio, height, 23 2/16; sub-height, 21 13/16; width, 14 14/16, signed "Chas. Willson Peale, pinx. et feci." and lettered "Worthy of Liberty. Mr. Pitt scorns to invade the Liberties of other Peoples." It is not necessary to describe it in detail, as the reproduction speaks for itself better than words can; but the history of the picture, and of the figure and portrait of Pitt, is most interesting, and so little known as virtually to be unknown.

Pitt's career and his relation to the colonies have been traced and considered by so many hands and from so many viewpoints, and are so well known if not so well understood, that it is not essential to rehearse or even refer to them here, more

¹ Written by another hand.

² Impressions located are: Public Library, Boston (Chaloner Smith); Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (Phillips Collection); Horace W. Sellers, Philadelphia (Charles Willson Peale); Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, Ophir Hall, N. Y. (Maggs); Francis W. Halsey, New York (Fridenberg); R. T. H. Halsey, New York (J. T. Sabin); Lord Rosebery, London, England (Parsons); Frank M. Sabin, London, England (Mitchell).



STATUE OF CHATHAM AT CORK, IRELAND

than to say that he was the idol of a large portion of the colonies, and it was this sentiment that was the genesis of Peale's pictorial work, although it was not Peale who originated memorializing it in art. Indeed the idea had its birth in Ireland, where too Pitt was canonized as a Great Patriot. Dublin presented him with the freedom of the city, and Cork voted a statue to be erected in the municipality with the inscription "Vera Icon Gulielmi Pitt cujus si nomen audies, nihil hic de fama desideres," the order for which was given to Joseph Wilton (1722-1803), the most eminent British statuary of the period, later one of the foundation members of the Royal Academy of Arts, and sculptor of the monument to General Wolfe, the hero of Quebec, erected in Westminster Abbey, as also of many busts and statues of distinguished persons. This statue of Pitt was finished in 1766, at a cost of £500, and was placed in the Exchange, then standing in Castle Street, in the city of Cork, whence it was subsequently removed to the Mansion House, and to-day will be found in the corridor of the Crawford Municipal School of Art, in Emmet Place, Cork, Ireland.

Whether the atmosphere surrounding this Irish monument was wafted across the seas and stirred the colonials similarly to honor this friend of the colonies, or the idea they carried out originated with themselves, we do not know; but coincident with the erection of the statue in Cork, the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina, on May 8, 1766, unanimously voted "that this house will make provision for defraying the expense of procuring from England a statue of the Right Honorable William Pitt," and on June 23 voted £7000 currency for the purpose which, on November 30, the treasurer of the colony was directed to turn into "good bills of exchange for £1000 sterling" and remit them to the agent in Great Britain toward payment of the statue.¹

The agent of South Carolina, who was intrusted with this commission, was Charles Garth, member of Parliament for Devizes from 1761 to 1784, who by letter of July 9, 1766,² accepted with pride the duty intrusted to him and employed Wilton, who has, he wrote, "signalized himself remarkably by a statue of Mr. Pitt finished this Spring, for the city of Cork and

¹ *South Carolina Hist. and Gen. Magazine*, xv. 22.

² *Mag. of Am. Hist.*, viii. 216.

admired by everybody here before sent to Ireland." He mentions further that Wilton has made in addition two busts of Pitt "which for likeness and workmanship both, are very greatly admired," adding, "I have given in your directions to have him at full length in a speaking attitude and suitable dress, with a roll in one hand, inscribed Magna Charta." It would seem that two designs were submitted by Wilton and forwarded to South Carolina by Garth, which as late as 1836 were in possession of Charles Fraser, a miniature painter in Charleston.¹

Close upon the heels of South Carolina's action, the citizens of New York held a meeting at Burns Coffee House, June 23, 1766,² and petitioned the Assembly to erect a statue in honor of Pitt. The measure was carried through and Wilton was engaged also to make it, which he did by following, with slight changes, the one he was modelling for Charleston. Both statues were shipped about the same time — the South Carolina *Gazette* of May 17, 1770, announcing the arrival of the one destined for that colony, adds: "At the same time that the above statue was shipped in Capt White two others were shipped for New York, one of his present Majesty cast in Brass, the other of Mr. Pitt, highly finished in marble, but considerably under the size of ours."³

The Charleston statue was placed on its pedestal July 5, 1770, at the intersection of Broad and Meeting Streets, near which spot it now stands within Washington Square. The South Carolina *Gazette* of July 11, 1770, describes it "of fine white marble, the Habit Roman, the right hand holds a Roll of Parchment, partly open, on which we read 'Articuli Magnae Cartae Libertatum.' The left hand is extended, the figure being in the attitude of one delivering an Oration."⁴ This description shows that the instructions transmitted by Garth were carried out, and also, what is much more important, preserves a picture of what the statue was like originally, for it has suffered many vicissitudes. In 1780, April 16, the right

¹ *Mag. of Am. Hist.*, VIII. 217.

² *2 Proceedings*, IV. 292.

³ As well as can be judged from what remains of the two statues they were virtually of the same size.

⁴ John Austin Stevens, in his discourse on *Progress of New York in a Century*, describes the New York statue *ad verbum* "from the journals of the day." *Mag. of Am. Hist.*, VII. 67.



STATUE OF CHATHAM AT CHARLESTON, S. C.

arm was carried away by a British cannon ball, fired from James Island, and fourteen years later the statue was taken down from its pedestal in such a careless manner that the head was severed from the body, and when it was replaced no attention was paid to its position relative to the action of the figure, with the result that it is decidedly awry. The outstretched left arm has also disappeared, so that to the casual observer the statue has much the appearance of a mutilated antique.

The New York statue was erected September 7, 1770, at the intersection of Wall and Smith, now William Street; but during the occupation of the city by the British the head and right hand were struck off in September, 1776, by the soldiery in revenge for the insult previously shown by the Americans in pulling down the statue of the King, which had also been made by Wilton. The headless trunk remained standing until July, 1788,¹ when it was removed, and after sundry migrations, what remains of it is in the hall of the New York Historical Society. Maryland also fell into line, and in November, 1766, passed resolutions for a marble statue of Pitt in Annapolis, but it seems not to have materialized.²

The necessity for this somewhat minute account of the statues to Pitt, made by Wilton, will become apparent in the consideration of the Peale allegory; but before discussing that subject I must call attention to the extraordinary statements of Mr. Basil Williams, in his life of Pitt (1913), where in Volume II, p. 121, he says, speaking of the Cork statue, which is the frontispiece to his book: "It was made by the sculptor Wilton and was thought so good by Pitt that when he was consulted in 1766 by the agent for North [sic] Carolina about a statue of him for Charleston, he recommended Wilton again"; and further, on p. 206: "Garth their Agent in London writing on July 9, 1766, says he has consulted Pitt on the Sculptor . . . and Pitt had chosen Wilton who had recently finished the statue for Cork. . . . It seems to have been a replica of the Cork Statue." This is a most unusual and remarkable use of authority, for Garth says not a word about consulting Pitt in

¹ *Mag. of Am. Hist.*, iv. 59.

² Dedham, Mass., erected a shaft with a wooden bust of Pitt on top. It is represented in the *Dedham Historical Register*, I. 121.

his letter of July 9, 1766; he mentions merely having advised Pitt of the action of the House of Commons. Garth does say that Pitt did choose Wilton to make the Cork statue, which is a valuable endorsement of Wilton's likeness of Pitt, and there can be no doubt that Chatham was perfectly well satisfied with Wilton's work or it would not have gone forth to the public in so many different forms — three statues and two busts — when a man of his power and consideration could easily have prevented it were it not satisfactory to him. Neither are the American statues in any way replicas or duplicates of the Irish one, or alike in any details, as can be seen by comparing the reproductions.

Charles Willson Peale, who was a much better painter than he is generally credited with being, owing to his best-known pictures being the poorest examples from his brush, was born in St. Paul's Parish, Queen Anne's county, Maryland, April 15, 1741, and died in Philadelphia, February 22, 1827. Having tried many vocations he determined in his twenty-fifth year that art was the one he was best qualified to follow; and after some instruction from John Hesselius, the native-born son of Gustavus Hesselius, the earliest known artist in America,¹ he visited Boston to get some hints from Copley, who was only a few years his senior, but with a reputation that extended not only over the colonies but to London. In December, 1767, Peale hied himself to London and the studio of Benjamin West, where he remained more than two years, returning to Maryland in June, 1770. While in London, Peale was not, as he writes in his autobiography,² "content to know how to paint in one way, but engaged in the whole circle of arts, except painting in enamel, also learned modelling and casting in plaster . . . and made some essays at Mezzotint scraping." These last words are full of import to our subject. At that time the atmosphere was, as we have seen, so full of the Pitt fever, that one of Peale's earliest pictorial endeavors was a large canvas, ninety-six inches high by sixty-one inches wide, an allegory of William Pitt, which attracted the patriotic connoisseurship of another son of Maryland — Edmond Jennings.³

¹ *Vide Harpers' Magazine* for March, 1898.

² *Penn. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, xxxviii. 264.

³ This gentleman's name is usually wrongly given as "Edmund Jennings."

This gentleman was the grandson of Edmond Jenings, Lieutenant Governor of Virginia—1706-1710—and son of Edmond Jenings, Secretary of State of Maryland, who married Ariane Vanderheyden, widow of Thomas Bordley. By her he had a daughter who became the mother of Edmond Jenings Randolph, better known as Edmund Randolph, a conspicuous member of Washington's cabinet, and one son named for his father and grandfather, who, born in 1731, accompanied his parents to England in 1737, where he was educated and bred to the bar. He was loyal to the colonies, acted in several quasi-diplomatic capacities in behalf of his native country such as secret agent at the court of Brussels and secretary for some time to John Adams. He resided in London in the vicinity of Kensington Square and was a daily visitor to the Westminster Library, dying in September, 1819, in his eighty-eighth year.¹ His armorial book-plate is in the Franks Collection at the British Museum and is one of the rarest among American *ex libris*. This cultivated American was requested by Richard Henry Lee² to secure for Westmoreland in Virginia a portrait of Lord Camden, which he failed to accomplish owing to the multifarious public engagements of this great lawyer and statesman. Instead Jenings wrote to Lee, November 1, 1768,³ "As the honest cause of America hath been supported with true liberality by that great man Lord Chatham,⁴ I could wish that his merits were not forgotten and therefore take the liberty of sending you by Captn. Johnson, his portrait which if you think it worthy of the acceptance of the gentlemen of Westmoreland, I beg you to offer them in my name. It was executed by Mr. Peele of Maryland who was recommended to me by several friends in that province as a young man of merit and modesty. I found him so, and heartily wish he may meet with every encouragement on his return to America which I believe will be soon." Jenings adds a very important P. S.: "The head of Lord Chatham is done from an admirable bust by Wilton and is much like him tho' different from the common prints."⁵

¹ *The Bordley Family*, 1865; *Monthly Magazine*, 1819, VIII. 182; *Annual Obituary*, London, 1821, 368.

² *Life and Correspondence of Richard Henry Lee*, I. 49.

³ *The Virginia Historical Register*, I. 72.

⁴ Elevated to the Peerage, 1766.

⁵ Williams says, p. 121, of the Cork statue: "It gives a more lifelike impres-

The gentlemen of Westmoreland accepted the gift and expressed much appreciation of the design. It was set up at Chantilly,¹ the seat of Lee, where it remained until 1825, when it was placed in the new courthouse of the county, to remain until 1848. It was then taken to Richmond, Va., and hung in the house of Delegates until 1902,² when, upon the erection of another new courthouse, in Westmoreland county, at Montross, the painting was returned and placed amid the environment originally intended for it. This was a canvas too important to the painter, both for size and subject, for him to allow it to pass out of his control without preserving a full memorandum. Accordingly Peale painted a duplicate nearly the same size as the original (ninety-three inches by fifty-six inches), which he brought with him back to Annapolis and subsequently presented to the state of Maryland, which the Assembly accepted by vote, April 16, 1774, offering Peale as a compliment for his "very genteel Present," the sum of "one hundred pounds common money." The painting hangs in the state capitol building at Annapolis. It was from this replica that Peale must have scraped his mezzotint plate, and it would be interesting to know to a certainty whether the work was executed in London or in Maryland. The probabilities are that it was executed and printed in London. As far as we know it was Peale's first plate, and he would hardly essay it alone without having some one skilled in the art at his elbow to advise and guide him. Then it seems quite certain that he could not get the necessary copper plate in this country, although he could have brought one back with him; but where was the plate-press and the plate-printer to pull off the impressions, after the plate was ready for proving? It is true Peale was a very ingenious mechanic and might have printed the plate himself, for he did, according to his diary, print his small plate of Washington in November, 1778, and got the copper plate for it a month before from a "Mr. Brook."³ Notwithstanding these possibilities the mezzotint was doubtless a London product. The broadside prospectus of the print, that has been mentioned, appears to me to be from an American

sion of the minister . . . than either of the two contemporary portraits by Hoare and by Brompton."

¹ *R. H. Lee to Langdon Carter, Letters of Richard Henry Lee*, 1. 76.

² *Acts of Assembly of Virginia*, 1901-1902, 676.

³ *Penn. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, xxviii. 247.

press. The "Extract of a Letter" I have not seen in the original, but as its size corresponds with the prospectus, they were doubtless issued from the same press contemporaneously; indeed, as it has no earmark, alone and unaccompanied by the prospectus it would have no significance or value. This "Extract" is a most important document in our investigation. Although it purports to be an excerpt from a letter, neither place nor date is given, and inherently it shows, I think, Peale's hand, merely cast in this form to make it appear adroitly as coming from a disinterested correspondent. It is really a plea for the correctness of the likeness of Pitt, which evidently had been attacked at the time as it has been since. Mr. Jenings, anticipating this result from its being an unusual and unfamiliar portrait, tells Richard Henry Lee it "*is much like him, tho' different from the common prints.*" Jenings' comparison is clearly one made with Pitt himself, while the comparisons made in the "Extract of a Letter" are all with engraved portraits of him, which makes it plain to me this was not written in England, where Pitt's living face was well known, but in America, where his living face was unknown and his lineaments only familiar through the medium of engravings after the paintings by Brompton and by Hoare, which are in big wig and in the costume of the period. The Extract says:

One of the Mezzotinto's was brought into Company, when all agreed it was Very clever; but some thought it "not like Pitt." . . . Perhaps it was hazardous to offer to the Public a Portrait so unlike the old Pictures, which have been long known among us. Very few have Seen any other Representation of the Great Man, and we know how Strongly First Impressions work on the Imagination: And, what is yet more disadvantageous to the Painter, not only First Impressions, but many Years intimate Acquaintance with the old Piece, has probably So fixed that Likeness in the Mind, that, were Mr. Pitt himself to be of a sudden present, and appear a Contrast to those Pieces, there would not be a total Want of Weak Minds, who might even struggle to conceive he was like himself — preferring the Likeness with which they were so intimate.¹ But between the old Copies and the present, I do not see that great Disparity that is pretended: Pray attend to them,

¹ Is this the source of John Neal's conceit in "Charcoal Sketches," where he says if Washington came back to earth and did not resemble Stuart's Washington he would be considered an impostor?

and make all due Allowances — Twenty Years between the Drawing the one and the other — such Difference in his Age! In the one he is in modern Dress, with Neckcloth, a Wig, and full Suit: In the other, with his natural Hair, a loose Roman Habit, and Neck bare. I am assured that Gentlemen, who had seen the Proof-Copy, and among them Dr. Franklin, thought Mr. Peale's a very good Likeness of the Great Patriot, as he is at this Time, worn down with Sickness and Years, and with Fatigue in the Service of his Country.

The reference to Doctor Franklin having seen a proof-copy of the plate, evidently meaning a proving print and not an early finished proof, is very strong evidence, almost conclusive, that the plate was well advanced, if not completely finished, in England; for while a proof could have been sent across the water to him, it is not in the least likely that one was — certainly not in time for his remarks upon it to have come back and been incorporated in this printed circular, advertising the plate. Peale did not get back to Maryland until June, 1770, and it was only five months later, in November, that he sent his present to Copley of a finished print. It is true that mezzotinting is of very rapid execution in comparison with the labor of a burin or line plate; yet for a novice to scrape the plate and send a proof across the ocean in those days, when Peale himself was twelve weeks making the passage, and get an acknowledgment from Franklin, who was proverbially deliberate in his correspondence, is next to impossible.

Not that it counts a feather's weight one way or the other in determining the nativity of the plate, but simply that all the evidence may be in, the print is recorded by Chaloner Smith in his *British Mezzotint Portraits*, 963, where the account of it and of its author is so amusing in its multiplicity of errors that it bears quoting: "Charles Wilson Peale was an American Painter who practised during the Revolutionary war and *afterwards visited Europe*. He studied with Copley and West. The following is *his only mezzotint*,¹ and it was almost certainly engraved *in America about 1777*. The likeness [of Chatham] is so indifferent that it must have been a fanciful one." The impression described by Smith was purchased at the sale of his collection of mezzotints, in 1887, by the Public Library of

¹ He made three mezzotint portraits of Washington and one each of Doctor Franklin, La Fayette and Rev. Joseph Pilmore.

Boston, and at least three others have appeared in England, which is additional argument that the plate was made there.

Although we have Peale's allegory before us in the reproduction of the mezzotint, the artist's own description of his composition is not without interest. In his manuscript autobiography¹ he thus describes it: "Mr. Pitt is here represented in Roman dress, in the action of an orator, extending his right arm and points to the figure of Liberty, and holding a scroll in his left hand on which is written 'Magna Charta'; before him an altar with a civic crown on it and a flame rising, designate his zeal in the cause of liberty. The altar is ornamented with the bust of Hampden and Sidney, and wreaths of oak leaves embrace them. In the background is a piece of elegant architecture, Whitehall, in front of which King Charles I was beheaded."

This word-picture of his painting, taken in connection with the newspaper description of the South Carolina statue on its arrival, shows that Peale reversed the position of the arms, making the left in the painting hold Magna Charta instead of the right, and the right extended in place of the left, greatly to the advantage of the figure. The costume too is quite different, and again the advantage is with Peale. The head of Pitt in the allegory is confessedly from Wilton's bust of that statesman and, making allowance for the hard usage the Charleston statue has received, besides its exposure to the elements for almost one hundred and fifty years, by which all its fineness has been destroyed, leaving a mere ghost of what it originally was, the head in Peale's mezzotint closely follows that of the statue. Taking it all in all, this was a work of no inconsiderable magnitude to be undertaken by a young man of twenty-seven who had only been an art student a shade more than two years. It was of magnitude not only in size but in conception and execution, and shows a nice intimate knowledge of history almost unexpected in a colonist who had not had a collegiate education. Allowing for any hints he may have had from his preceptor West, who was to become the greatest history painter in England, he deserves high commendation for his accomplishment.

From this completed survey of the entire subject it is clear

¹ In possession of Peale's great-grandson, Mr. Horace W. Sellers of Philadelphia.

that the statue in Charleston is not a replica or duplicate of the one in Cork, Ireland, or the figure in the Peale picture a servile copy of either; but it seems quite certain that the Cork statue fathered the thought that produced those for America, and that Peale's portrait, to say the least, was inspired by the American marbles which he doubtless saw in the studio of the sculptor, Wilton. The plate too was scraped and printed in London and brought overseas for sale, when Peale got out his prospectus and "Extract of a Letter" together, for the latter without the former would be unintelligible, and set to work to sell the prints in which he was not successful, as we learn from his autobiography before cited. He writes, in the third person, "When he was in London he painted a whole length of Mr. Pitt in the idea that if he made a print of it that it would be readily sold in America. Therefore he made a large mezzotint print from his picture, but let it be remembered that he never sold as many prints as would pay him the cost of the paper, perhaps he did not take the proper method for the sale of them." Poor Peale had not learned how short-lived was the acclaim of the public; that the Idol of to-day was the football of to-morrow. What was all aflame in 1768-69, when he began his commemorative work, was dead embers in 1770-71, when his allegory was ready for the market. This may be a sad commentary upon hero worship, yet it is true almost always of the living; but Peale's lesson accounts for the rarity of his mezzotint to-day. The only impression that I know to have been sold at public sale in this country was in the noted collection of Hon. James T. Mitchell, in Philadelphia, October 28, 1913, where a slightly cut-down copy brought \$160. It is from that copy our reproduction is made, and we are indebted to Mr. Stan V. Henkels of Philadelphia for the use of the plate.



